

Town of Waretown
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and
County Road 532
Waretown
Ocean County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1024

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF WARETOWN

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Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and County Road 532, Waretown, Ocean County, New Jersey.

Significance: Waretown was established as a religious community by the Rogerine Baptists in the early eighteenth century. Beyond its early religious history, Waretown is significant as a bay town, often referred to as the "Barnegat Bay resorts." The villages fronting the bay were established communities relying on the products of forest trade and sea long before the railroad brought resort trade. Waretown rivaled neighboring Forked River and Barnegat for the title of best fishing and gunning grounds, as well as supported various industries including shipbuilding, cranberry farming and a grist mill.

History: Waretown, located south of Forked River, on the Barnegat Bay, was first settled in 1737 by the Rogerine Baptists. The first religious society in Ocean County, this group lived in Waretown for eleven years before returning to Morris County. According to tradition, the town is named after Abraham Waeir, a member of the Rogerines who remained behind, built a mill, and became a successful businessman.¹ Once known as Waeir Creek and Waeir Mills, the town grew around the gristmill built on Waretown Creek.

During the Revolutionary War, British troops tried to prevent merchant vessels loaded with lumber from leaving the harbor; they also kept a close eye on the saltworks at "Soper's Landing." Known for its Barnegat sneakboxes even today, Waretown was a busy shipbuilding center in the 1790s. 100 years later, describing the competition with Barnegat and Forked River for amateur sportsmen, Kobbe emphasized the town's superior geographical location.

In point of fact, Waretown is the most favorably located of the three places for fishing excursions, because there a tongue of solid ground penetrates the salt meadows to the edge of the bay, and the landing is within a few minutes of the railroad station and at the same time right on the bay.²

Today, North, South and Liberty Harbors are the sight of recreational facilities as well as commercial industries.

The majority of the residential development occurred along Main Street or Old Main Shore Road. Victorian two and one-half story homes, such as the Dugan home on Birdsall and Main Streets built at mid-century, illustrated the success of local shipbuilders and lumber and charcoal merchants. The 1877 Woolman and Rose map

¹ Edwin Salter, A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties (Bayonne, N.J.: E. Gardner & Son, 1890; reprint, Ocean County N.J.: Ocean County), 251.

² Gustav Kobbe, The New Jersey Coast and Pines (Short Hills: By the author, 1889; reprint, Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1977), 66.

showed land divided into large farms, primarily belonging to the Birdsall and Holmes families. An extensive piece of property close to the bay was owned by Capt. Newbury. Sea captains from Toms River, Forked River, Barnegat and Waretown used Civil War profits to establish the First National Bank of Toms River. By the early 1870s, the Toms River and Waretown Railroad, which connected with the New Jersey Southern Railroad, encouraged further building. The railroad station, built in 1871, was remodeled into a residence and moved to its present site on Clearwater Avenue in 1895. At least two resort hotels were built to accommodate expected visitors from New York and Philadelphia. As Long Beach Island became increasingly appealing to vacationers, particularly after the construction of the railroad causeway, Waretown lost much of its tourist trade.³

Cranberry farming was an important Waretown industry for two centuries. In 1916, the Corliss sons purchased a cranberry bog from the Birdsall family, possibly one of the three bogs off Route 532. A concrete block sorting house once owned by the Corliss' still stands at 29 Main Street in front of the old cemetery. The brothers also owned the American Moss and Peat Company, where they cleaned and dried sphagnum moss collected from cedar swamps.⁴

Though cranberries and moss are no longer harvested, Waretown still depends on maritime industries. Planned with an eye towards the bay, contemporary neighborhoods of trailer-like summer homes line the little streets between Hornblower Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. Nineteenth century residences, sheds and deserted commercial buildings are scattered throughout the woods between Main Street and the sea. Because it is located further west of Route 9, Waretown remains a relatively undisturbed hamlet, probably more like it was in the early 1800s than during the busy post-railroad "resort" years of the 1880s and 1890s.

Prepared by: Sarah Allaback
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Summer 1991

³ "Ocean County Historical Sites Survey, Ocean" (Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981), 2.

⁴ John Beattie, ed., Township of Ocean, Waretown, N.J. Bicentennial Report (Waretown, 1976).

- Sources: Beattie, John, ed. Township of Ocean, Waretown, NJ Bicentennial Report. Waretown, 1976.
- Kobbe, Gustav. The New Jersey Coast and Pines. Short Hills: By the author, 1889; reprint, Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1977.
- "Ocean County Historical Sites Survey, Ocean." Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981.
- Salter, Edwin. A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties. Bayonne, N.J.: E. Gardner & Son, 1890; reprint, Ocean County N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society. [n.d.]
- Woolman, H.C. and T.F. Rose. Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast. Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985.

Project Information:

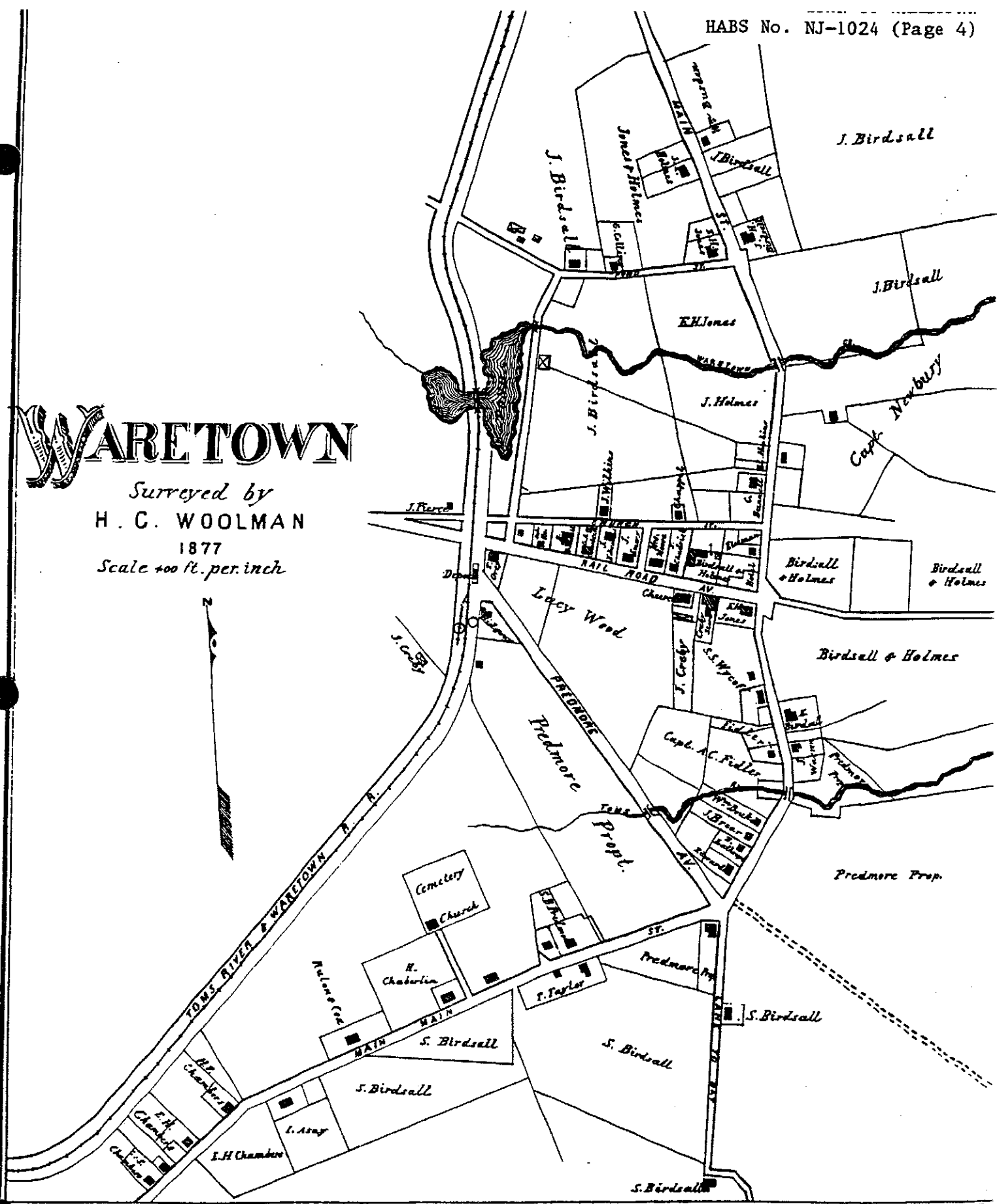
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WARETOWN

Surveyed by
H. C. WOOLMAN

1877

Scale 400 ft. per inch



H.C. Woolman and T.F. Rose, *Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast* (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985), 297.